

MINEHEAD URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S INTERIM ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1939

MINISTRY OF HEALTH CIRCULAR NO. 2067.

In accordance with the instructions contained in Circular 2067 all statistics are omitted from this report which deals shortly with matters of public health and the extraordinary conditions affecting such matters.

It must be borne in mind that the normal population of the area is in the neighbourhood of 6,000. On the 1st September evacuated persons began to arrive. By the 3rd September 976 had arrived and were being accommodated. Of these 250 were adults; made up of teachers, voluntary helpers, mothers and expectant mothers. Unfortunately there was difficulty with some of the children as they were totally unsuitable for the billets provided, the children being in many cases dirty, verminous and totally untrained in sanitary usages. This led to grave dissatisfaction and it was some time before matters could be satisfactorily accommodated and cleanliness again established in the homes. A good deal of trouble undoubtedly arose from the total ignorance of the local population of these unpleasant conditions and the methods for dealing with them. For dealing with the worst of these cases a hostel was established which proved an unqualified success.

Maternity cases were also evacuated to the district and were dealt with first of all by the Minehead & West Somerset Hospital and later by the Maternity Home established by the County Council at Sherwood House. The existing Welfare Centre was expanded to deal with the infant population, and the Ante-Natal Centre dealt with the expectant mothers. These services all worked smoothly and well.

After a fortnight it was found that most of the mothers with children had drifted back to their homes and the Ministry transferred the Regent Street Polytechnic School into the town. This brought the total number to roughly 1,100. In addition to this 1,100 there was a very considerable influx of self evacuated persons who made their own arrangements. By the end of September the population was 50% above its normal figure.

It was not long before it became obvious that the billeting accommodation of the town was overstrained, and conferences with the Ministry subsequently led to an amelioration of the position.

As was to be expected towards the latter part of the year epidemic diseases made their appearance and continued in varying degree until the end of the year. Difficulty was experienced in checking the spread of these diseases owing to the exceptional number of children in the town and the conditions under which they did their school work, and the close contact necessitated by the billeting arrangements. Atmospheric conditions of the homes brought about by the black-out were undoubtedly contributory.

The epidemic diseases were fortunately not severe although widespread. They included scarlet fever, diphtheria, German measles, Measles, Mumps, Chicken pox and Whooping cough. Cases of the acute specific fevers were dealt with at the local isolation hospital in the following numbers:-

Scarlet Fever.	19
Diphtheria.	2
Typhoid Fever.	1

The health of the evacuated children undoubtedly improved in the healthy country surroundings in spite of the epidemics.

The large increase in the population of the town by evacuated and self evacuated people threw a considerable strain on the town water supply. The work on the Nutscale Reservoir was not advanced enough to make any contribution to that supply. The severe winter weather delayed the work and it will require another twelve months before it can function if labour and supplies are forthcoming. Fortunately some additional supplies were available from Mr. Luttrell's private supply at Moor Brake. It is vitally necessary for the health of the town with its augmented population that the reservoir at Nutscale should be finished at the earliest possible moment.

In addition to the evacuation problem A.R.P. and other War time services have thrown a great strain on the Council's Officers. This strain has been greater by the absence of many of the junior Officers with His Majesty's Forces. It is a matter of congratulation that in spite of this the normal services of the town have been meticulously and satisfactorily carried out.

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Medical Officer of Health.

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